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10 January 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT : Comment on Nasir's letter to President-elect Nixon

REFERENCE: Cairo 00031, 6 January 1969

1. Nasir's letter of 5 January to President-elect Richard Nixon is a lengthy, dogmatic, and somewhat florid restatement of the Arab position. There is nothing new in the letter, which may have been largely designed to open a channel of communication. It offers no fresh approach towards Egyptian-American relations--in fact, it is something of a step backwards--and seems to be a rather clumsy plea for American understanding of Egypt's viewpoint. It may well have been written with an eye to building the record and to eventual publication in the Arab world, and accordingly reaffirms Nasir's thoroughly Arab position.

2. Nasir refers approvingly to Governor Scranton's fact-finding mission. He then launches into a review of Egypt's grievances towards the United States since 1956 in a mood of unmistakable bitterness and disillusionment, even speaking of "a last attempt before it is too late." If his intention was to arouse sympathy, his approach is curiously inept; for example, he includes a gratuitous reference to the tremendous progress being made on the Aswan Dam. This is followed almost immediately by praise for "that superb attitude taken by President Dwight Eisenhower's administration in 1956," which he calls "the last outstanding American position adopted towards the entire Arab nation"--a not-too-subtle appeal to partisan feelings.

3. Nasir undiplomatically charges that the US bears "at least morally" a great responsibility for the June War, since the US appealed to Egypt to exercise self-restraint and Egypt was then caught by the Israeli surprise attack. Nasir proceeds to raise the spectre of the "Big Lie" by alleging that "there were American fighter aircraft over our positions during the fighting," although he mentions that he received "an explanation" from President Johnson. It seems incredible that Nasir could be renewing a charge which he has repudiated,

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even if reluctantly, in the past. His allusion may be to US carrier planes sent to the aid of the USS Liberty, but these planes did not overfly Egyptian territory.

4. Nasir maintains an inflexible position with respect to Israel, insisting that Arab land cannot be ceded to Israel, that the Arabs cannot negotiate with Israel while their lands are under occupation, and that the idea of separate settlements between individual Arab states and Israel is out of the question. Since previous statements had hinted that a settlement could be arrived at without reference to Syria or the return of the Golan Heights, this position would seem to be a step backward. His suggestion that there is such a thing as unified Arab position is ludicrous.

5. Nasir may be hoping to probe the new administration to find out just how much support is forthcoming. In any event, he apparently wishes to inaugurate a dialogue, even though he may not have chosen the most diplomatic method of doing so.

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S E C R E T

their missiles dispersed on a variety of subs--  
important item is how many tubes they have in  
operation.)

e. How many nuclear bombs can a B-52 carry?

(Answer: Up to half a dozen, depending on con-  
figuration.)

f. How many Polaris type subs are Soviets building  
a year?

(Answer: Six to eight by the end of 1969.)

2. Israel-UAR

a. As a result of the Israeli victory, what is the  
percentage increase in Israeli-held territory?

(Answer: Three hundred percent.)

b. Average weekly figure for Israeli casualties as  
a result of terrorist attacks?

(Answer: Can't be determined in a useful way since  
there is no pattern; weeks go by with no casual-  
ties and then many will be killed in a single  
incident.)

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c. How many F-4s do the Israelis want from the US?

(Answer: About 50 plus a few F-4 trainers.)

d. Need a fact to support generalization that several purges have occurred in UAR officer corps.

(Quoted fact that entire army and air force high commands were cashiered after war because of negligency.)

3. USSR

a. How do we break down Soviet leadership in terms of hard-liners versus soft-liners?

(Answer: Appropriate hedging along the lines of "it often depends on what the issue is," etc.

Softer  
Kosygin  
Polyansky  
Mazurov

Harder  
Brezhnev  
Podgorny  
Shelest  
Kimlenko

Hard-to-Pin Down)  
Suslov  
Shelepin